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ABSTRACT

Suggestions on how to use the newspaper in the social studies classroom are given in this instruction sheet. Objectives for using a newspaper in classes are to help the student develop the habit of reading a daily newspaper; to interest him in current events; and to encourage the student in critically examining newspaper accounts. To encourage habitual reading ideas are given on principles of setting newspaper displays on bulletin boards, and other devices for creating interest in current news such as newsmaps, broadcasts, notebooks, and files. Other sections deal with how to help the student develop a background for news and skills for reading a newspaper; how to evaluate the news; ways that teachers can use news materials which are especially prepared for school use; how to use newspapers to increase the effectiveness of other mass media; and guidelines for using the newspaper effectively in class and for judging the quality of the local newspaper. A brief selected bibliography is included. Related documents are SO 005 979 through SO 006 000. (SJM)

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How To Do It Series—No. 5

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How To Use Daily Newspapers

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What Do We Hope To Accomplish by Using Newspapers in Social Studies Classes?

We want to develop in each student the habit of reading the newspaper every day in order that he may be adequately informed about events in the community, state, nation, and world. We hope that the habit will continue throughout his life.

In addition we hope to expand the interest of the student, from whatever interest pattern he has when he enters high school, to include the events reported by the metropolitan press.

A third objective is to encourage the student reader to read critically the accounts of current events in order that he may discuss contemporary issues intelligently, and act with good judgment.

How Can We Encourage Students To Form the Habit of Reading a Newspaper?

Most boys read the sports page and girls are interested in fashions and accounts of social events. Both sexes read the comic strips. Recent public opinion polls indicate that 50 per cent of the adult population do not go much beyond this stage in their habitual reading.

The Bulletin Board

The problem then would seem to be one of expanding the interests of the student to include a wider range of events. A bulletin board could be used for this purpose. The events of the day may be called to the attention of all students by a display which keeps up with the news and changes the emphasis from one area to another.

The following principles should guide us in setting up a bulletin board:

1. If a bulletin board is not changed *every day* people do not stop to read it.
2. Bulletin board exhibits which are most effective are pictures, maps, headlines, and blown-up articles. Small type is hard to read. The object of the bulletin board is to stir up interest—not to provide complete information.
3. Place the bulletin board where people pass frequently or wait for something or somebody. A cafeteria line is a good place. The main hallway is another good spot.

The bulletin board should exhibit "all the news that's fit to print" in headline, map, or picture—but not all on the same day. The committees which rotate in keeping up the board should use some system for establishing priority and diversity, local news, national news, and world events, with reports from the field of science, health, the fine arts, the theater, movies, and radio and television. Special exhibits should be prepared around personalities who are outstanding figures in the news and on recurring or persistent news topics. The board should make a contribution toward making news fashionable in the school in order to stimulate habitual reading.

The Newsmap

In one high school, an electrified map operated by rotating committees indicates the spots which are in the news for the day. Narrow ribbons connect the electrified spots with bold-type headlines noting the news. The electric map is kept in the library where *behind-the-news* book exhibits are related to the news events.

The News Broadcast

A second high school uses an additional device for creating interest in current news. News broadcasts are pre-

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pared by student committees and summaries of school news and world news are given over the public address system during the week.

Notebook and Clipping File

If possible, organize the clipping file as a part of the school library with one student responsible for a file on one subject. If each room has a file, a student librarian will be needed to keep the file in order. The file should be a library which is used when panel discussions, round tables, and forums are planned.

Individual files or notebooks work best when the student keeping the notebook is following some special interest. Notebooks which duplicate each other and are compiled to meet course requirements are likely to become routine tasks. More is gained by having a student read a newspaper casually and throw it away than to have him clip out the items and arrange them in a neat, thick notebook—without reading them.

How Can We Develop the Reader's Background for News?

The young reader is at a disadvantage in having to begin most news stories in the middle. Many of the problems in American life are either long-standing or recurring. Unless the event is new it probably has a long background which the adult reader has acquired from years of newspaper reading. The teacher can supply the background in many cases. Social studies classes can draw upon recent books, periodical literature, the atlas, encyclopedias, and other reference works to add background to the day's account.

A more complete analysis of the situation behind the news may lead to a change in attitude. Crime news changes when criminals are revealed as the badly adjusted children from underprivileged families living in rural or urban slums, or possibly overprotected children rebelling against their environment. Crime news then becomes less dramatic and is read as a need for better housing, improved family life, better recreation, and better schools. By supplying social background, much of the spectacular news of the day may be blended with sociology to form a philosophy to be used in making civic judgments.

The quality of reader judgments is improved when current events are viewed in the long perspective of history. Past and present can be studied together in history classes using metropolitan dailies. The slow progress toward international peace may seem less disheartening after studying the long history of feudal strife which ended in national peace. A study of the earlier phases of the industrial revolution may suggest ways and means of helping underdeveloped countries raise their standards of living by giving them simple know-how through the Point Four Program. All questions of government are judged by the criteria of democracy and humanitarianism which developed slowly as a part of Western Civilization. How did we get where we are? And what has the experience of the past to contribute to the solution of the present problems? These are two questions which must be finally answered if the solution is to be in terms of progress rather than retrogression.

If the news reported in the metropolitan daily is trivial, spectacular, or sordid, is that the fault of the editor or the reading public? Can the school create a wider interest in international affairs, scientific developments, movements for civic and social improvement, book reviews, art and music, and education? Do the news readers make the editor and publisher aware of their demands and build an editor-reader relationship which improves the newspaper as an institution?

How Can We Develop Student Skills for Newspaper Reading?

Every student can quickly learn about the format of his paper, and its news sources and columnists, by bringing a complete edition to class and following the group discussion while the format is outlined. The following questions should be considered:

1. What is the make-up of the front page? Where is the news found which is considered most important by the editor? The story of second importance? Third?
2. Where are the sports page, market reports, weather report, local news, announcements of meetings? Is there an index to help you find the different news departments?
3. If the edition is printed in two sections what is the difference, if any, in the type of content found in each?
4. What different editions does the paper publish? Are there separate morning and evening editions? Are there early or first editions and final editions of the paper?
5. Which news service is employed? Does the paper you are reading have access to both news services: Associated Press and United Press International? If so, what proportion of the foreign and national news is covered by press reports from these agencies? Are pictures as well as news services included? (The organization and work of the news service should be

clear to the reader, also the nature of the contract between the news service and the local paper.)

6. How much of the newspaper's reading matter is purchased from syndicated services? Does it carry regular columns by syndicated writers? Is the material on homemaking, fashions, movie reviews, etc., written locally or purchased from syndicates?
7. How much coverage of its own does the newspaper have? Learn to identify the source of the story by the by-line. Many of the dailies have Washington correspondents and maintain news staffs in foreign capitals. Staff members are sent out on special assignments. Special contributors write for some papers at intervals on subjects on which they are experts. Make a chart of all the news coverage for one day in the newspaper and compute the percentage of the edition which has been written by local staff, and the percentage of news supplied by news services and syndicates.
8. A complete set of exercises may be developed and each reader asked to test himself for: ability to locate information quickly; skill in scanning a news story to locate the major facts. What? When? Where? Why? Who? How? After allowing five minutes for reading a news account each member of the group may be asked to list on paper the major idea or ideas of the story.

How Can We Help the Reader Learn To Evaluate the News?

Henry Johnson has described the attitude of balanced criticism which characterizes the competent reader: "It is of course absurd for anyone to say that he believes nothing which he reads in newspapers. It is equally absurd to believe everything. It is no less absurd to believe only what we want to believe." Mr. Johnson continues, "The cultivation of a more intelligent attitude should begin as soon as children begin to read newspapers."[1] However, the danger of teaching a person how to run before he has learned to walk is present in helping the young reader to read critically. Probably he should become a fairly steady reader and cover a large range of topics in the news before too much of his time is given over to learning evaluation.

Here are some yardsticks that can be used for measuring the accuracy of the news:

1. *Do the headlines accurately describe the news account?* One social studies class examined different newspapers which carried the same news story and compared the headlines. It was found that widely different descriptive headlines announced news events which were reported very much the same in each paper. This exercise can be repeated in any class. The question might be asked, "Why was this particular headline written?"
2. *Is the news account slanted?* News stories are supposed to be based on *fact*. *Opinion* is left for the editorial page. However, news stories may be handled by not publishing them at all, or by "burying" on an inside page those the editor doesn't like, but doesn't dare suppress. This device of arranging news and selecting parts of stories for emphasis is an instrument which the propagandist calls "card stacking." The news items are so arranged that the reader will probably reach the conclusion which the editor wants him to reach. There are other tricks of the trade which can easily be found in advertisements but are used more subtly on the front page. Testimonial, the device of having the expert give an interview when "expert" and editor are in agreement, is sometimes used. Name calling and glittering generalities appear in speeches quoted on the front page. Pictures frequently show candidates for office as simple country boys at heart (the "plain folks" device), and news is sometimes used to convince the reader that "everybody is doing it" and he better get on the bandwagon before it is too late. The cartoons make use of a device called transfer. Something we love or respect is frequently shown with another person or idea that we haven't accepted but which the editor hopes we will.

   The mature student who is able to identify all slants and devices is in a position to answer the question, How much of what I read in *this* newspaper on any given topic can I believe?
3. *Is important news treated adequately?* Have the class list two or three important international and national issues and follow the news handling which they receive in the local paper over a period of a week or two. If possible, secure copies of papers like *The New York Times* and *The Christian Science Monitor*—newspapers that recognize significant issues. Comparison should be made in length of story, placement, agreements and disagreements in details and conclusions, extent of coverage (local, correspondents, AP reports, etc.), and kinds of coverage (news stories, cartoons, editorials, columns). Comparisons between the space given by the local paper and by weekly news magazines with national circu-

[1] Johnson, Henry. *Teaching of History*. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1940. p. 329.

lations will give some basis for judging the adequacy of coverage by the local paper. Emphasis given to news by radio and television news reporters and commentators would form another criterion.

4. *Are controversial events reported impartially?* What are the sources of information? Are the sources of information made clear? Are all sides of the question, and different points of view held by different interest groups, adequately represented? Does the newspaper tend to get its information wholly from one side, or are all sides represented? Was the episode reported observed by the writer or was it an account written on the basis of information loosely gathered?
5. *Does the newspaper distinguish between fact and opinion?* Are facts which are not clearly ascertained noted as such, or are they related as though there was certainty of their validity? Are pictures clearly identified as to place, participants, circumstances, and relationships to the event being described? Do they add to the authenticity of the story? Are they one-sided or impartial? Are pictures used to stir up emotions for or against a person or issue?
6. *Are the editorials and commentaries effective?* Do the editors show competence in the subjects which they treat? Do they help the readers interpret important data and propose solutions for public problems which seem to be supported by data? Are the editorials easy to understand and interesting to read?

   The editorial page is where the editor has the privilege of expressing his own opinions. Do not accept all statements on the editorial page as facts. Columnists are also expressing opinions; they are writing editorials, for the most part, which are sold to several newspapers. The same questions which are asked about the editorial writer may be applied to the columnist.
7. *Is it a free press?* Are readers given opportunities to voice their opinions in letters to the editor which are printed? What are the expressed or implied beliefs about the newspaper on freedom of the press? On other civil liberties? Does the newspaper practice what it preaches about civil liberties and democratic responsibilities in its treatment of controversial issues?

How Should the Teacher Use News Materials Specially Prepared for School Use?

A major objective of the school is to have the student when he graduates assume an adult role in his community. In order to do this he must depend upon the same mass media which adults use. Therefore any specifically prepared materials, such as *Scholastic*, *The American Observer*, *Our Times*, in addition to their contributions toward understanding the present, should be used to build skills and interests which will finally be used to read the metropolitan daily, and periodicals of news and opinions. If the teacher begins with the periodicals prepared for the junior high school level, the daily paper should be used occasionally along with the special materials. In the senior high school adult materials should be used more frequently with publications specially prepared for the upper grades. In grades 11 and 12 the goal should be to supplement prepared school materials with all the adult materials that an alert and active citizen reads.

Ingenuity should be used to make all discussion of news as functional as possible. Weekly tests on factual news items which have not been discussed, or individual reports by students who lack skill in oral reporting are not likely to reach the objectives of expanding interest and understanding. Specially prepared materials have suggestions for class use which include panels, round tables, interviewing people in the community, conducting public opinion polls in class, school, and community. Such devices use rather than repeat news. The feature story or article in the magazine prepared for school use may be used as the center of a bulletin board exhibit around which other items are organized.

How Can Newspapers Be Used To Increase Effectiveness of Other Mass Media?

The programs of local radio and television stations appear daily in most newspapers. A class project could list all recurring radio and television programs which contribute to a better understanding of the news and of public issues. The same criteria which were used for the editorial page would apply to the radio and television commentator. News summaries would be subjected to the same rules that govern news. Entertainment programs are announced and reviewed in the newspaper. The student can use the newspaper to expand his knowledge of radio and television programs, their time and stations.

The daily newspaper carries announcements of all movies with the time each complete showing begins. Movie reviews offer a good field for critical thinking. The student can form the habit of getting other opinions about movies before making a choice of what show to see. After seeing the movie he can either affirm or deny the dramatic judgments of the writer who reviewed the film he saw. "Movie filler," the long accounts of the lives of film stars and their activities, forms a part of the feature stories in

most papers. This is an introduction to the technique of getting "free advertising." Such accounts can be useful in studying the devices of the propagandists since they are areas where news and advertising copy blend together.

Newsreels picture the events and personalities of the day and bring another item of experience which helps to understand the news story. The same standards of criticism applied to news stories should be used to evaluate the newsreels.

Periodical literature is found in most homes, should be in the school library, and may be a part of the classroom library in a school where considerable time is given to contemporary events and issues. Each member of a class can be responsible for examining one periodical, and a bibliography can be compiled of articles which appear each month and which are significant for understanding issues and events. A class report of a few minutes on each article will pool all significant ideas from the periodical field.

Book reviews form a small part of the daily newspaper in most cities. A page of book reviews in the Sunday edition is more common. Senior students should have *The New York Times Book Review* for class use before graduation. Skill in gleaning the basic ideas from a review should be developed.

How Can Newspapers Be Used Effectively in Class?

1. One day a week is designated as current events day. Individual reports, panel discussions and periodic tests are given on this day. Utilize several newspapers with different editorial points of view.
2. The newspaper forms a regular part of the materials used by the class in the course. Newspaper materials are fused with text assignments, special classroom news publications, reference materials, and periodical literature.
3. A rack for newspapers is placed in the school library. Copies of daily papers, including out-of-town papers, are kept in the rack.
4. When special periodicals for school use (such as *Scholastic, The American Observer,* or *Our Times*) or weekly news magazines (such as *Time* or *Newsweek*) are used, different plans are followed:
   a. In a large school one subscription for each five students is purchased and all copies are in the school library where they can be read during study hall or loaned overnight.
   b. The single subscription for each student is more expensive but is preferred by many students and teachers.

How Can the Student Learn To Judge Quality of the Local Newspaper?

A newspaper is an institution. Each paper has its own character, formed in part by its history and traditions, but constantly changed by its editors and its readers. It is a part of a larger institution, the American press, operating to inform the public and to help in the formation of public opinion. The vast network of the two news services reaches into all the large dailies. Through advertising, and because of the large investment required, newspapers are a part of the American economic system; each is a business which must make a profit in order to exist. While many papers maintain an independent attitude in politics, the American press has evolved within the framework of the Two-Party System, and an orientation toward either the Democratic or Republican Party is still the rule rather than the exception. Readers build a kind of loyalty to their papers. It is important for the reader who is to use his newspaper intelligently rather than follow it unquestionably to know about his paper, its ownership, the men who write it, and its place in American journalism.

Here are some important facts students can learn about the newspapers they use. In addition to the references suggested below, answers to many of these questions can be found in N. W. Ayers and Sons' *Directory of Newspapers and Periodicals* or in *Editor and Publisher Yearbook,* both of which may be available at the local newspaper office.

1. *Its publishers and owners:* Who are the owners? Is it owned by a stock company in which many people share in the ownership or by individuals? Is it part of a chain or a purely local enterprise? Are the publishers local people or do they live in another city?

Much of this information can be learned from the masthead of the daily. Students should become familiar with that part of the newspaper.

2. *Its history:* How long has it been in existence? Has it always been owned by the present publishers? How did it come into existence? Did it ever stop publishing and start again? Which important national or local historical events have been affected by its writings?

Most dailies publish a historical brochure which gives such information to subscribers. Many large city newspapers have full-length books giving their histories.

3. *Its expressed policies:* The front page or masthead will often identify the expressed purpose of the newspaper. *The New York Times,* for example, believes in publishing "All the News That Is Fit to Print." *The*

Christian Science Monitor has a formula whereby it prints news of crime only when an anti-social problem is involved and when warning or remedy can be applied.

What is the newspaper's expressed formula about printing the news? Does the formula include a statement about the kind of advertisements it accepts? This information can be obtained from the editors or publishers.

Is there a stated affiliation with a political party, or a statement of independent status? If so, what is the statement? If political affiliation is not expressed, what is the common belief regarding the newspaper's affiliation? What party, if any, did it seem to follow in the last three national and state elections? Read the editorials of back issues to get this information.

Are there expressed formulae about other issues, such as labor, civil rights, taxes, democracy, conservation, or other domestic or foreign matters? The masthead may deal with these issues, or information may be available in key editorials which are often reprinted for general distribution.

It would be valuable to see how the expressed policies of the newspaper studied stack up with "The Canons of Journalism," an ethical code adopted by the American Society of Newspaper Editors and printed in many books on journalism.

4. *Its staff:* Who are the people who write the editorials? Is the editorial policy solely in the editor's hands or is it determined by other people or interests? What is their educational background? What kind of newspaper experiences did they have before their present work as editors? Do they have any strong feelings about newspaper publishing which they want to pass on to readers? An interview with the editor or editorial staff should bring out this information.

How does the staff secure news? What events do reporters "cover"? What information comes from publicity people? What news comes from the wire services? Where does the remainder come from? How much potential news or news copy is omitted? Why?

How large is its staff? About how many are engaged in each of these divisions: the news, composing and press rooms, business offices, and circulation?

What are the general requirements the newspaper has for people it employs as city editors, rewrite men, and reporters? Have these men had wide experience on newspapers in other cities, as Washington correspondents, or foreign correspondents, or has all their experience been on the local paper?

5. *Its plant:* Where (city and street address) is the newspaper located? What modern equipment for gathering, composing and printing the news is available?

A trip to the plant will bring answers to these questions. Most newspapers encourage students to visit their plants and to see how a newspaper is made.

6. *Its circulation:* What is the over-all circulation of the newspaper? How much of it represents street sales and how much home deliveries? What are the morning and evening circulations? In what portions of the city are the deliveries largest? Where smallest? Does it have a large out-of-town circulation? If so, where?

Information of this type can be received by writing or interviewing the circulation manager. Often this kind of information will help students determine the influence of the newspaper, and also the special appeal it may make to different socio-economic neighborhoods.

7. *Its income*: Study the business operation of a newspaper. What percent of its income comes from circulation? Does the single copy price of a newspaper cover its cost? What percentage of the income comes from advertising? How does its profit margin compare with that of other businesses?

8. *Editor and reader:* Keeping informed about events which cover the globe and range from the atom to the astronomers' accounts of the universe is a cooperative task for reader and newspaper staff. Thousands of highly trained men and women must work in a world network connected by wireless and cable to bring the news to the editors' desks. The editors must plan their news offerings for the day by a process of selecting local news as well as national and world news. The editors' selection will be determined in part by the interests, intelligence, sense of fairness, and reading skill of readers. Intelligent and civic-minded readers can help a newspaper achieve greatness—great editors promote an intelligent public opinion which is the foundation of civic greatness.

The final evaluation of any educational process must be made in terms of what changes have been made in the behavior of the person educated which would not have occurred if he had not worked through the educational experience. Two scales for evaluation may be used:

1. Is the reader aware of sensitive to, and concerned bout problems reported in the paper? How far does this concern extend, to neighborhood, community, state, nation or world? Into how many areas of human activity does it extend—sports,

fashions, national affairs, science, technology, medicine, religion, music and the arts? Few of us will cover all areas but a widening of interest indicates an increasing concern with the total culture.

2. What is the quality of the judgments which the reader is able to make in the several areas listed above? To what extent does he use his skills in reading, gathering data, and critical thinking in arriving at his judgments? How far has he traveled along the road from novice to expert? We cannot all be experts, but one goal of education in a democracy is to encourage a maximum of expertness in all citizens. Only in this way can a free society expect improvement in the quality of the culture.

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Suggested Plans for the Study of the Newspaper in the Classroom ($1.00)

The Teacher and the Newspaper ($1.50)

Teachers' Manual for the Use of the Newspaper in the Classroom ($.75)

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NOTE: This *How To Do It* notebook series, designed for a loose-leaf binder, provides a practical and useful source of classroom techniques for social studies teachers. Elementary and secondary teachers alike will find them helpful. The titles now available in this series are: *How To Use a Motion Picture, How To Use a Textbook, How To Use Local History, How To Use a Bulletin Board, How To Use Daily Newspapers, How To Use Group Discussion, How To Use Recordings, How To Use Oral Reports, How To Locate Useful Government Publications, How To Conduct a Field Trip, How To Utilize Community Resources, How To Handle Controversial Issues, How To Introduce Maps and Globes, How To Use Multiple Books, How To Plan for Student Teaching, How To Study a Class, How To Use Sociodrama, How To Work with the Academically Talented in the Social Studies, and How To Develop Time and Chronological Concepts.*